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History of a purposeful legal-travel collection operation run from the United States.

OPERATION LINCOLN

Robert Vandaveer

CIA's organization for the collection of foreign intelligence from sources in the United States has long directed a major part of its effort toward exploiting the intelligence potential of U.S. travelers abroad. During the past seven or eight years of increased tourist travel to the USSR and official exchange visits of experts in various fields it has devoted a great deal of time and energy to briefing and debriefing those who may thus have opportunities to make useful observations, seeking to exploit these sources of opportunity with reference to targets of opportunity. A departing traveler would be briefed about what intelligence was needed in the field of his own specialty; but beyond this the operation did not go.

After Sputnik I had intensified and focused attention on the problem of the Soviet long-range missile threat, however, and the location of missile sites became the number-one priority collection task of the intelligence community, it was recognized that such travel had additional potential which could be tapped. It was decided that travelers whose discretion could be trusted and whose itineraries looked promising for the purpose would be so briefed as to be able to recognize and report indications of missile activity, especially launching sites and production facilities, without getting themselves into trouble with the Soviet authorities. In February 1959 the new program, designated Operation Lincoln, began.

First Phase, 1959-60

It was not a simple matter of passing out the word; much preparation was required. The domestic collection officers were not expert in missile requirements and indicators, in the details of travel procedure in the Soviet Union, or in the niceties of operations approaching the clandestine. Close coordination with missile analysts and clandestine offices was

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Operation Lincoln

needed. Since the traveler sources would be scattered all over the United States, the domestic field offices would need central direction from a headquarters staff competent in the Lincoln program. And there was none too much time before the coming tourist season, April to October.

Representatives from the interested scientific and economic analyst offices were appointed to maintain liaison with the directing staff, providing consumer support and guidance. Ten contact specialists—domestic field officers—and three headquarters officers were put through a crash training program with the help of the analyst offices and the clandestine collection staff concerned with the U.S.S.R. The ten became the Lincoln officers in the field who helped recommend the selection of travelers to be exploited and, when these were approved, briefed them on requirements and procedures and trained them in making observations; the three went into the Lincoln Staff at headquarters which directed the program, passed on field officer recommendations, arranged special briefings and training as required, and processed the resulting reports for dissemination.

During the 1959 season the program was intentionally experimental and conservative. At its end 3,836 travelers had been screened, preliminary assessments made on 612 and determinate assessments on 159, and 64 been briefed. To keep the risks within reasonable limits these travelers were limited to visual, photographic, or conversational observations. They did not see any long-range missile sites, but they helped map the deployment of anti-aircraft missiles, and a number of their reports were given high evaluations. Lincoln had not been expected to provide answers to the major substantive questions confronting the intelligence community. It had been hoped, however, that its travelers could discover clues to the presence of missile activity and, secondly, provide operational intelligence for clandestine operations against likely targets. It was beginning to fulfill especially the first of these hopes.

The value of the 1959 experiment was twofold. First, the wrinkles which any new program is bound to have could be spotted and ironed out. Second, the positive results were promising. Some of the weak points were delays in reporting,

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insufficient detail in reports, and dependence in areas of prime interest upon people in exchange groups, who may have less freedom of action than individual tourists. With respect to consumer guidance, requirements were too often compiled at the last minute, lacked background information, and were not kept up to date after the travel season started.

On the positive side, the high criteria for Lincoln reporting raised the over-all quality of domestic-source reports, the operation tended to focus more of the domestic-source activity on the U.S.S.R, and it demonstrated that observational reporting is possible on subjects outside the observer's specialty. Lincoln's main accomplishment, however, was to show the value of giving specific guidance to the observer, concentrated on particular known or suspected intelligence targets.

The 1960 travel season was expected to produce better reporting, additional information on suspect areas, full coverage of specified air routes, and the locations of more air defense missile sites. The Guided Missile Task Force furnished a new handbook with expanded target information and specific requirements on targets. But these hopes were dimmed in May by the U-2 incident, which brought a ban on photography, sketching, and note-taking by Lincoln travelers. Nevertheless, 90 cases were originated during 1960, 55 resulted in travel to the USSR, and 34 of the 55 produced reporting related to missile requirements. This proportionally high productivity was attributed to the better understanding of requirements that resulted from close contact with the Guided Missile Task Force.

The period from May 1960 to May 1961 was an uncertain one for Operation Lincoln. There were serious doubts among some policy makers as to the wisdom of utilizing U.S. travelers to the Soviet Union for intelligence purposes. But the need for information on the Soviet missile threat continued high, and the operation now had a good record both for supplying missile intelligence of significance and for avoiding serious political difficulties. Its continuance was therefore authorized with tightened-up control of initial approaches to travelers, coordination of briefings with the competent clandestine service offices, and a continued ban on photography, sketching, and note-taking. Plans were laid for expanded op-

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Operation Lincoln

erations in 1961. In April 1961, however, with further strains in the international climate, the briefing of Lincoln travelers was prohibited.

Second Phase, 1961-62

Meanwhile the community's technical intelligence had done so well with missile deployment that the main focus of unfulfilled need shifted to pre-deployment missile activity, to research and development. In this field no observations a traveler could make would be likely to contribute much; the only likely source of information would be a Soviet citizen employed in the activity or a related one. It might be possible, however, for a U.S. citizen with whom such a Soviet citizen had a common bond to draw him out in friendly conversation to the point of revealing something useful—the process known in clandestine tradecraft as elicitation.

Elicitation has the advantage of being operationally safe; there is nothing illegal about it. It is most likely to be successful if carried out in a secure and relaxed setting, without a language barrier, using an approach which is indirect but has a sense of direction, and working inductively from peripheral manifestations toward the central question. If necessary a silent partner expert in the particular technical field can provide back-up. The elicitor can of course be deliberately deceived; but the possibility of deception is not unique to elicitation. The important precondition of a common bond is satisfied if the American has a reputation in the Soviet citizen's professional field or one related to it.

With these considerations in mind Operation Lincoln was now radically reoriented, and approval was received for a program of briefing U.S. scientists in missile-related fields to elicit information from Soviet scientists. The intensive briefing includes a broad summary of the organization of research and development under the Soviet Academy of Sciences, a brief summary of what we know of the Soviet missile program, a detailed examination of the Soviet effort in the elicitor's own scientific field, detailed data on the personalities and institutions with whom he may be in contact, and information on Soviet counterintelligence and provocation practices and how to defend himself from them. Envisaged is the development

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of a relatively small number of well-trained, long-range U.S. citizen sources whose information should be reliable because of their own stature and the position of their Soviet informants. The program would concentrate on a directed search involving a limited number of specific targets.

Experimental projects along these lines have brought promising results. The reporting on the 12th International Astronautical Federation held in Washington during October 1961 was evaluated outstanding as an example of what comprehensive elicitation techniques can accomplish. It gave new as well as confirmatory information about the Soviet man-in-space effort and the fundamentals of Soviet space flight. There was consequently established for the 1962 Conference on Space Research an ad hoc task force to coordinate intelligence exploitation, and the results achieved compared favorably with those from the 1961 conference. Some important information was obtained in the field of bio-astronautics, and the elicitation from Gherman Titov was considered quite good.

It is too early to judge what the ultimate value of the elicitation program will be; more time and experience are needed. But the principal beneficiaries of the reoriented Lincoln reporting, the scientific analysts, are enthusiastic about the prospects of this special collection effort mounted on their behalf. They have drawn up a list of priority interests to guide it and have attempted to point out individuals or types of persons who may make good sources. And at the time of writing there is a recommendation before the USIB for the expansion of Lincoln into other fields of science than those related to guided missiles. It is judged that the program has already provided useful information and has a potential for even more useful information in the future.